



SENATOR RUNNER'S WEEK IN REVIEW

A WEEKLY REVIEW THAT WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED AND UP-TO-DATE



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We Must Improve the State's Infrastructure Wisely

The Governor has challenged the Legislature to make a commitment to improving California's infrastructure, from roads to water systems to levees, after more than four decades of neglect. The infrastructure investments of nearly half a century ago were designed for 25 million people, not the more than 37 million we have now, nor the 46 million expected by 2025. This fact comes as no surprise to anyone who spends countless hours in traffic on our aging roads or has pumped out flood waters resulting from our failing flood control system. We expect our government to provide roads we can actually drive on, sufficient water storage to meet demand, and a levee system that prevents parts of our state from becoming the next New Orleans, yet until now officials have made no attempts to live up to these expectations.

In response to the Governor's challenge, some will simply call for money to deal with the problem. However, throwing money at the problem will not repair our state's crumbling infrastructure. Instead, we need real reforms, such as CEQA reform and the Governor's call for design-build and public-private partnerships, in order to get infrastructure projects completed quicker and at less cost. These same principles were used to restore Southern California freeways after the Northridge earthquake in a matter of months, not years.

In addition, we need to reduce the bureaucratic red tape that delays projects and ultimately costs taxpayers more money. Environmental reforms, as well as permitting and regulatory reforms, are necessary to speed up the pace of projects to improve our infrastructure. For example, it does not make sense that adding a new lane to an existing freeway should be tied up in environmental review for years. Or in levee repairs, that a project originally funded at \$800,000 in 1996, was finally completed six years later at a cost of \$8 million. Another, funded after the 1995 floods, just began construction this past spring due to regulatory delays. Improving or expanding any existing state structures, whether it is levees or roads, should have a truncated review process similar to getting approval for building an addition on a home as compared to building a new one. This way highway expansion projects will be completed sooner at less cost.

News of the Week

[Amber Alert Anniversary](#)

[Momentum Building to Control Sex Predators](#)

[Conference on Sex Offender Laws
Unites Law Enforcement Officials](#)

[Death Penalty Moratorium Bill Dies in Committee](#)

[AV Press Editorial: Nothing is More Important
Than Protecting Our Children](#)

[Press Enterprise: Predator Watch](#)

[GOP Legislators Want Reforms,
\(i.e. CEQA Reform\) for Proposed Bonds](#)

[6 Vie for Mayor, 10 For City Council in Lancaster](#)

Without these reforms, we are simply wasting taxpayers' time and money. All you need to do is look at the Bay Bridge project as an example. The funding has always been available for the bridge. Yet it has been more than 15 years since the Loma Prieta earthquake, and the Bay Bridge expansion and seismic retrofit is still not completed. So what is holding up completion of the bridge? Environmental reviews, mitigation projects, and other bureaucratic red tape. As a result, the bridge will now cost billions more than initially anticipated.

Our regional priorities include adding a lane to SR 14, I-15 and I-5, as well as expanding Highway 138 and getting started on the High Desert Corridor. These projects of regional significance ought not to be unnecessarily delayed by review after review by state bureaucrats who sit in their air conditioned offices, while we sit in traffic.

These examples illustrate the need for being fiscally responsible in paying for infrastructure, which is why I am the author of the Governor's proposed debt limit constitutional amendment. For many years, California allowed spending to exceed revenues, in turn plunging our state into a structural deficit. While the deficit has been reduced in the last two years, the lesson remains that taxpayer dollars need to be spent wisely. A debt limit will help achieve this fiscal responsibility by ensuring that as the state continues to invest in the future, California taxpayers are protected from reckless debt levels.

Once the Governor's reforms are in place, we can prioritize our infrastructure needs to ensure that the public's money is going to the projects of greatest importance. Otherwise, some politicians may use an infrastructure bond to finance their pet projects, like bike lanes, parks, and riparian zones, instead of focusing on highways, levees, storm water drainage, and new drinking water projects. While some may believe that this is an exaggeration, our state's history is littered with examples of misused bond funds. Since 1988, billions in water bonds have been authorized, yet only 3% of the funds went to levee repair, maintenance, and improvement. The rest went to pay for other items, such as mitigation, environmental easements, and water assessments—not to fix our aging water storage system, to add additional storage capabilities for future drought years, or to protect us from possible floods.

This is simply ridiculous. We improve Californians' daily lives when bond funds pay for the state's true needs, like roadway expansion and improving the state's levees and other storm-water protections. We cannot turn a bond measure into a Christmas tree that is covered with presents to special interests or rooted in systems that no longer function. If we do, our state's bonded indebtedness will spiral out of control and our children and our children's children will be paying for our mistakes. If, however, we reform the system to reduce costs and time delays and to establish a bond that meets our most pressing needs, we can leave our children a legacy we can be proud of.

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